Progress on threatened and endangered species in national parks

By Peter A. Dratch

For the protection of the federally endangered Eureka Dunes evening-primrose, in 2003, staff at Death Valley National Park closed a portion of a park road, relocated a campground, and scarified compacted soils to promote natural reseeding of the plants. A combination of grants and funds from the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program paid for the project.

Table 1. Number of federally listed species in the National Park System listed by status and the number of current or historical populations in national parks

Status Trend in National Parks	Number of Species	Number of Populations
Endangered	200	597
Threatened	84	419
Experimental	3	13
Proposed	4	9
Candidate	51	84
Total	342	1,122

Table 2. Number of endangered, threatened, proposed, and candidate species and populations in the National Park System by taxon

Group	Number of Species	Number of Populations*
Plants	148	244
Mammals	39	243
Birds	50	337
Reptiles	18	124
Amphibians	6	9
Fish	35	100
Invertebrates	46	65

*Number of populations reflects both current and historical populations in parks.

THROUGH TARGETED RESTORATION projects and training at the regional and national levels, national parks have an increasingly important role in species recovery under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). In the past year, 284 endangered or threatened species of plants and animals were recorded on lands managed by the National Park Service, with another 55 species either proposed for or designated as candidates for listing (table 1). An additional 246 populations have historically existed in parks, and in many cases these could be restored.

Plants remain the largest category of listed species in the national parks (table 2) and are increasingly the target of recovery efforts funded by the Natural Resource Preservation Program (NRPP). Mauna Loa silversword (*Argyroxiphium kauense*) was reestablished at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park with NRPP funds designated for threatened and endangered species this year, and three of the top four projects chosen for FY 2005 funding were for plant restorations—the fourth was for the dwarf wedgemussel, a mollusk. The NPS Endangered Species Act database details the status and trends of these species in each park. It not only suggests potential restoration projects, but also enables park staff to evaluate progress toward their goals for these species.

Although the Pacific West Region has the greatest number of federally listed species and park populations, all regions have listed species that require particular management attention (table 3). Some solutions that benefit these species are implemented by parks on their own. For example, at Death Valley National Park (California and Nevada), a road and a campground occupied habitat of two endangered plants, the Eureka Dunes evening-primrose (*Oenothera californica* ssp. *eurekensis*) and the Eureka Valley dune grass (*Swallenia alexandrae*),

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Table 3. Number of federally listed, proposed, and candidate species and populations in each region of the National Park System, and the park within each region with the most of those species

Region Populations	Number of Species	Number of Populations
Alaska (Kenai Fjords National Park)	10	14
Intermountain (Capitol Reef National Park)	70	247
Midwest (Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore)	22	99
National Capital (C&O Canal, Prince William Forest Park, and Rock Creek Park)	4	19
Northeast (Gateway National Recreation Area)	24	61
Pacific West (Haleakala National Park)	194	391
Southeast (Everglades National Park)	104	291

Table 4. Population trends of federally listed, proposed, and candidate species in the National Park System for 2002

Status Trend in National Parks	Number of Populations	Percentage of Populations
Not at risk	82	7.2
Stable	225	19.9
Increasing	93	8.2
Declining	101	8.9
Extirpated	204	18.0
Unknown	402	35.5

in addition to six endemic beetles, one endemic bee, and several other special-status plants. After consulting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and addressing provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act, the park closed a portion of the road, relocated the campground, and scarified the ground to promote reseeding of the plants. A combination of grants and funds from the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program paid for the project.

Park personnel took advantage of training offered at the national and regional levels for techniques in managing listed species. "Scientific Principles and Techniques for Endangered Species Management" was offered for the first time at the Horace M. Albright Training Center in February. The course was a joint effort with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, with instructors and students coming from both bureaus. A one-day course, "Modern Genetics for Resource Managers," was held in conjunction with the George Wright Society meeting in San Diego in the spring. The genetics examples came from studies conducted in national parks and demonstrated how new molecular research methods could answer population questions that are important to management. Section 7 consultation training (Endangered Species Act) was offered several times in the Intermountain Region, and plans are under way to bring this course to other regions.

The National Park Service is directing more of its funding to listed species whose need is most immediate: this year the amount spent on declining and extirpated populations went up, while dollars spent on stable and increasing species went down. (Money is spent on extirpated populations in preparation for their restoration.) To continue this trend, management summaries have now been completed for almost all of the threatened and endangered species that occur in the national parks. They relate basic biological information in addition to the recovery goals for the species on a website in a form that is accessible to resource managers.

The NPS ESA database summary clearly points to areas where the National Park Service can improve with respect to threatened and endangered species. The number of populations where parks reported the status as unknown remains at about 35% (table 4). One way parks can reduce this percentage is through coordination with the Inventory and Monitoring Program because listed species are a priority in many Vital Signs monitoring plans. ■

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